No. 88

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Another woman and a man were with her, and she clearly showed the marks of dissipation. The moment she was seated, she got busy with her vanity case.

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ALICE and Russel Sherwood were seated in the cozy sitting-room chatting pleasantly. She was a most charming hostess, and it was with a mighty effort that the enamored young man held himself under control.

"We shall return to Philadelphia in a few days," Alice said suddenly.

Russel Sherwood stared at her with his lips trembling.

"Why are you going so soon?" he faltered.

"Because my husband is insistent, and I must follow him like a dutiful wife," Alice replied with a heavy sigh.

"I — I shall be sorry indeed to lose you, Mrs. Ames," the young man stammered. "You — you do not know what that means to me."

Alice looked at him curiously through her half closed eyelids. She was well aware that he was gazing at her with his very soul in his eyes.

By accident their hands met. It was only a slight, fleeting touch; but it was sufficient to cause the hot blood of Russel Sherwood to mount to his cheeks.

His self-control was gone like a small cloud before a cyclone.

He grasped Alice's hand and put it to his lips. She looked at him wonderingly as he covered it with hot, passionate kisses. She might have withdrawn it, but she suffered it with a tolerant smile.

To Russel Sherwood this meant volumes. He leaped from his seat and the next moment his strong arms held her to his bosom, while his lips sought her eagerly.

"Alice—Alice, I love you, I love you so much," he cried. "I cannot live without you."

With a half frightened cry she disengaged her

self from his embrace.

"Russel, you must not—you really must not," she quivered in a low voice. "My husband might return any moment now."

She had scarcely uttered the words when approaching footsteps fell upon their ears, and an instant later the door was opened. Robert Ames stood upon the threshold.

There was a peculiar expression in his eyes as he advanced into the room. If he suspected what had been goiong on, he failed to show it. With an affable smile he offered Russel Sherwood his hand.

The young man was visibly embarrassed. He could not frame a reply to Robert's pleasing remark. Picking up his tennis racket and stammering a few inaudible words, he hastened from the room.

The young millionaire did not seem to mind Russel's hasty exit. With a curious smile upon his face he turned to Alice and said in a most matter of fact manner:

"I received a letter from the bank secretary this afternoon. I am sure it will interest you to some extent, my dear."

"What is it, Robert?" she panted, her eyes meeting his bravely.

"He informs me that the Governor of Pennsylvania has commuted the death sentence of Larry Coleman to life imprisonment upon the urgent recommendation of the district attorney. This means that the hot headed young fellow has a good chance of being pardoned."

"I am very glad to hear this for poor Cora Allen's sake," he continued after a slight pause. "I really believe that she would recover completely if her erring lover was restored to her."

Alice made no answer. She was looking past her husband out of the window. What these words meant to her Robert Ames would never know.

When she turned her face to him there was not the slightest trace on it of the storm that was raging in her heart.

She consented meekly to his plea that they return home the following day.

Robert Ames was immensely pleased to get away from New Orleans. Aside from the horse racing there was very little in that city which attracted him.

Arrangements to leave for home were made immediately. Russel Sherwood and his handsome son were disagreeably surprised when they heard that Alice and her husband were to leave the city for Philadelphia the very next day.

Young Russel was inconsolable.

He had hoped for another meeting with the woman he loved so madly; but it seemed that this was utterly impossible. Alice was never out of the presence of her husband's watchful eyes.

He wrote a letter, filled with passionate words of love, and sent it to her in a bouquet of flowers.

When the moment came that the train pulled out of the New Orleans station, he felt as though all the pleasure was going out of his young life.

His eyes were filled with tears as he stood there and watched it disappear in a cloud of black smoke.

The trip back to Philadelphia was utterly devoid of that spirit of pleasant anticipation which had marked their journey to New Orleans.

Alice seemed listless and preoccupied, and her thoughts were evidently not traveling along the same road as those of her husband.

Her thoughts were all of the handsome young

man who had made such passionate love to her. And she had begun to wonder if she and Russel Sherwood would ever meet again.

Something seemed to tell her that they would, and the thought brought a smile to her lips.

"I wonder if he really has the nerve to follow me to Philadelphia," she mused. "I just wonder. And would I be glad to see him? Yes, I rather think I would."

Chapter 294

THE TRUTH

ROBERT AMES had a legion of loyal friends. There wasn't a single man who had come in personal touch with the young banker and did not like him. Of course, he had his favorites like most of us. There were a certain number with whom he played poker at the club. Among them was Ralph Stewart, who at one time, had been his next door neighbor.

The sincere feeling of friendship between these two men had never waned, although they saw little of one another since the shooting of Earl Cortland.

No unusual or abnormal condition exists without some reason. And there was a reason for the lack of social intercourse between Robert Ames and Ralph Stewart. The reason was none other than Alice.

From the first meeting she had shown a well defined antipathy toward Stewart It was a strange sort of a dislike which founded on suspicion.

Alice had the instinctive feeling that she and Ralph Stewart had met somewhere before. His scrutinizing gaze whenever he looked at her was most disconcerting.

When an invitation came from the Stewarts, Alice always had an excuse. Through the social secretary she pleaded another engagement.

Robert Ames, busy with matters of finance, had little opportunity to follow up his wife's decisions and movements.

Since the unfortunate shooting affair, the breach

between the Stewarts and the Ames' seemed to have become widened. It was Ralph Stewart who introduced Earl Cortland to Robert that night at the club.

Of course, he had no knowledge of the man's shady past and his former connection with Alice. Nor did he know that his real name was George Ballard, a smooth social parasite from Chicago.

That Ralph Stewart should feel badly about the man's tragic end was only natural. He was one of the many people who refused to believe that Larry Coleman had fired the fatal shot.

During the cessation of social intercourse with the Ames', fate had played a strange trick.

When in search for a suitable governess and companion, he had chosen from the many applicant a demure and very lovely young woman who called herself Hazel Wynne.

Little did he dream that this Hazel Wynne was the same girl whom Robert Ames had married in Westchester. At the very first meeting he was deeply impressed with the young woman.

She appealed to him very strongly. And, being a widower, she interested him. She proved to be a splendid companion for his growing daughter. And in order to perpetuate this relationship, he decided to ask her to become his wife.

Ralph Stewart was not a little shocked when she told him with tears in her innocent eyes that she already was a wife.

And then, amid a shower of tears, Hazel Wynne had told him her whole story. Stunned with consternation, Stewart was utterly at a loss what to say or what action to take.

He did not believe Robert Ames capable of deliberately deceiving this beautiful young creature.

And yet, as he listened to the ugly tale she told, he surmised foul play. He more than suspected that Arthur Vernon, the shrewd mediator for the Ames', had been the prime mover in the disgraceful affair.

For the time being he did not take any action. The only connecting link between the Stewarts and the Ames' was Dr. Felding. Through this source Ralph received a good deal of information.

It was during the temporary illness of young Bessie Stewart that Hazel Wynne proved her value as a nurse. Dr. Felding was first to notice this.

And Hazel, wishing to sever her connections with the Stewarts since her refusal to become Mrs. Ralph Stewart, had decided to become a professional nurse. The physician encouraged her in this.

And now fate once more took a hand. Mrs. Ames had been found lying unconscious at the foot of the marble stairs which led up to the veranda.

Dr. Fielding, diagnosing her case as concussion of the brain, needed a trustworthy and reliable nurse to take care of the patient.

When he broached the subject to Hazel, she consented to go. She had some reasons for desiring to invade the home of the man whom she once called her husband.

How she took care of the woman who was her deadly enemy and rival, has been told in a previous chapter.

But before she left the Ames mansion she wrote a letter to Robert which she placed on his desk in the library. Of course, this letter never reached its destination because Alice got her hands on it first.

The following day Hazel left the Stewart home. Before she departed, she had a lengthy chat with Ralph Stewart. She told him that she had written that letter

to Robert Ames.

And Ralph, disappointed and deeply chagrined at losing this splendid young woman, concluded to take a hand.

He felt it his duty to call Robert Ames to account. A terrible wrong had been done an innocent girl, and it must be righted.

So it happened that when Robert Ames returned from New Orleans, that he found a letter from Ralph Stewart awaiting him.

"I have a matter of great importance to discuss with you," the latter wrote. "Please call at my home at your earliest convenience. If possible, come to-night."

When Robert Ames read this brief message, his first thought was that Stewart wanted to see him about something connected with the murder of Earl Cortland.

He was just as anxious to see Ralph Stewart, as Ralph Stewart was anxious to see him.

Without saying a word to Alice about his intention, he drove over to the Stewart residence immediately after dinner.

Ralph, dressed in a comfortable smoking jacket and a cigar between his lips, received the visitor most cordially.

They went into the library and sat down. The usual preliminary conversation ensued.

Finally Robert Ames asked point blank:

"What is this matter of importance you wanted to discuss with me, Ralph?"

The latter shifted uneasily in his seat and coughed slightly.

"It is a rather delicate matter," he declared, meeting his visitor's gaze directly. "And I want you to understand that I have no desire to meddle with your pri-

vate affairs."

"I know that," Ames remarked with a smile. "You are not built that way."

Encouraged, Ralph Stewart went on:

"Until recently, I had in my employ a young woman who called herself Hazel Wynne. She——"

"Hazel Wynne?" the other exclaimed, his face paling. "Good God, what did she look like? Describe her to me, please."

The description was forthcoming, and it fit the young woman whom Ames had married in Westchester in every detail. Robert Ames half rose from his chair then sat down again heavily.

Ralph Stewart read the question in his unsteady eyes and said:

"Yes, she is the one. She told me her whole miserable story. And I am not afraid to tell you that I consider it the most rotten thing I ever came in touch with. Why did you do it, Robert?"

"Do what?" the latter gasped.

"Marry her and then cast her off like a broken toy."

It was some time before Ames could command himself sufficiently to speak. And when he found his voice at last, he told his side of the story in a quivering voice.

He told about the letter which Hazel had written, informing him that she had found a lover.

Then he related his experience in New York, how he had seen Hazel in a cheap cabaret with two men, and that she had been in an intoxicated condition.

Ralph Stewart shook his head.

"The woman you saw in that cabaret might have resembled Hazel Wynne closely," he declared with conviction "But I stake my soul that she was not the sweet,

demure girl who made such an ideal companion for my daughter. There is something fishy about this. How did you happen to be in that cabaret on the night you mention?"

Robert Ames then related that he had been called to New York by his secretary, Arthur Vernon. He also stated that he had allowed this same Vernon to look after his private affairs.

"I presume you trust this man implicitly, don't you?" Stewart said, blowing a dense cloud of smoke from between his lips.

"Why—why, I have no reason not to trust him," the other stammered.

For a moment both men stared at one another.

"Let me ask you another question," Stewart was first to speak. "Who besides yourself, was most interested in your ill-advised marriage to Hazel Wynne?"

For a minute Robert Ames failed to reply because a sudden suspicion assailed his mind. Several incidents of the past came back to him vividly.

Alice figured in all of them. And so did his private secretary. And once the spark of suspicion was fanned into a blaze, it threatened to become a mighty conflagration.

He recalled now the intimacy which had existed between Arthur Vernon and his wife.

Twice he had caught them together in a whispered conversation, which had been stopped instantly at his approach.

"My God!" he cried suddenly. "It can't be possible!"

"What can't be possible?" Stewart wanted to know.

"That I have been basely betrayed by those who professed to love and serve me."

Ralph Stewart shook his head.

"I wish I could set you straight there," he declared. "But I am afraid I can't. You and I did not see much of each other after your marriage to your present wife. I know that she never liked me However, that is beside the main issue.

"You obviously wronged an innocent girl who deserved a better fate. You went through a marriage ceremony with her. You admit that yourself.

"Then you were called home. For some reason you forgot that you already had a wife, and you married this Miss Procter. Didn't you realize that you were committing bigamy? Didn't you——"

"I did at the time, but I was helpless," Robert Ames interrupted with a note of pain in his voice. "Dad was dying and he as well as mother insisted that I marry Alice Procter. I went through with it because I believed that everything could be adjusted afterward. Poor dad died contented.

"Then my secretary called my attention to the fact that Hazel Wynne was not my legal wife since I married her when under age. Arthur Vernon was quite sure about that.

"I sent him to see Hazel, and he brought me a letter from her which nearly knocked me off my feet. He made me see the folly of going back to Hazel. He seemed convinced that she had gone astray and forgotten me."

"And you believed Vernon?" Stewart broke in at this point.

"I did," came back quickly. "I couldn't do anything else under the circumstances. But I determined to settle the matter to my own satisfaction. I ordered him to find Hazel so that I might make a financial settlement upon her. That was the least I could do.

"He went to New York, and wrote to me a few

days later that he had found Hazel. Together we went to a cabaret. Well, what I saw there, I told you before. I believed the drunken woman I saw to be Hazel. I left disgusted."

Ralph Stewart drew himself up.

"I told you before that the woman you saw at the cabaret was not the Hazel Wynne you married," he said. "It could not have been. She went to New York alright, but not as a fallen woman. Oh, she was tempted enough. No question about that. But she kept herself clean.

"I suggest that you question this private secretary a little close about the whole affair. In my estimation you were misled and misinformed for a definite purpose.

"And one more thing, Robert," the speaker added as he leaned forward and lowered his voice. "When Hazel waited on your wife during her recent illness, she left a letter for you. Did you get it?"

"No, I did not," Robert declared. "And I did not know that the nurse who waited on Alice was——"

"Certainly not," the other cut in. "Hazel left the day you came home. I don't suppose she could have stood meeting you face to face in your own home. Women do strange things. No doubt she wanted to find out for herself if you were really happy with your second wife."

Ames sat there with his head bowed.

All the love he had born Hazel rushed back into his fast beating heart. He saw her again as she had come to him in her simple bridal array.

Again he visualized her innocent, pleading eyes which had spoken so eloquently to him on that happy day. Remorse and determination seized him. But suspicion drowned them both.

His very soul cried for the verification of these

black suspicions.

First of all he must know why Hazel's letter had not been turned over to him. No one but Alice could answer that question.

"Ralph!" he cried, suddenly springing to his feet. "I don't know what to say to you now. But I am going to sift this matter to the bottom. I'll right the wrong I have done Hazel no matter what the cost. If I have been basely deceived the guilty shall suffer no matter who they may be."

There was a quick handclasp, and the distracted young banker rushed from the house.

Chapter 295

EXPLANATIONS

ROBERT AMES drove homeward in a most reckless manner. His mind was in a strange tumult. He no longer blamed cruel fate for having separated him from his Hazel. It had been accomplished by a deliberate and carefully laid plan, which had found its birth in a deceitful human brain and right in his own home.

He realized that his social secretary had been responsible, yet he could not find a motive for his ungrateful action.

There was something else at the bottom of all this. It had been instigated by someone who was vitally interested in his relations to Hazel.

A most frightful suspicion rose in his mind, but he fought against it with all his might. He would not believe that Alice had been at the bottom of it all.

His anger had grown steadily, and when he arrived at the Ames villa, it had reached its zenith.

With his face white and drawn, Robert Ames raced up the broad stone staircase.

The servant who answered the furious call of the bell, retreated before the ominous flash in his eyes.

"Where is Mrs. Ames?" he asked impatiently.

"She is in her private apartment," the frightened servant answered.

Robert ran up the steps and the next moment stood at the door leading to his wife's boudoir.

Alilce was rather surprised to see Robert enter without waiting for her invitation to do so.

When the door was suddenly pushed open she turned to greet him, but she stopped dead in her tracks as she noticed the ghastly pallor of his face.

"What has happened, Robert?" she asked in a trembling voice. A terrible suspicion had risen in her breast.

"I want the letter that young nurse wrote before she left," he demanded almost roughly.

She held him in check with the magnetic power of her wonderful black eyes, then slowly turned and walked to her desk.

The letter he wanted was still intact. It lay in a small hidden drawer.

With a peculiar smile playing about her lips, she handed it to her husband.

Robert snatched the letter from her hand in a manner which sent the hot blood of indignation to her face.

Unknown to him, the mask began to slip from her face, and she stood there revealeld in all her selfish and treacherous nature.

The intense silence which ensued was broken only by the stifled breathing of Robert Ames, whose eyes were eagerly devouring the contents of the fatal letter.

It ran as follows:

My Faithless Husband:

Perhaps I have not even the right to call you that. If I had said faithless lover, it would have been more truthful. Yet I can not forget that I, poor deluded, simple country girl though I was, had once the privilege of calling you my husband.

I am writing this letter under a fearful mental strain. But an hour ago I discovered the horrible truth.

This frightful mystery, which for a time threatened to dethrone my reason, was at last cleared up.

My poor brain, benumbed and tortured, had yet sufficient strength to grasp it all. It was surely cowardly of you to trick me into a mock marriage. Your love for me was all pretense.

Cruel fate could not have inflicted a more frightful punishment upon me than to lead me blindfolded into your own house, and make me the witness of the scene of happy felicitations between you and your wife.

Stupified with horror, I fled, because that very instant I realized that I had never been your wife.

I would rather have died than to meet you face to face, after you made a fool, a plaything of me.

I presume you are holding your head high among your many friend and associates. Perhaps it is well that they cannot read your black, deceitful heart.

Why did you ever cross my path? I believed and trusted in you as I did in my God. You won my heart the moment our handsome face thrust itself into my young life.

You came to me in the hour of need. Your chivalry and kindness made you my idol. I set you upon the pedestal which you yourself have demolished with our own hands.

I would rather have died than to know the awful truth of it all. But I must live, because

there is a greater responsibility resting upon my shoulders.

At last I can understand why you called yourself a criminal. Your guilty conscience had awakened, but you had not the courage and the manhood to face the inevitable.

No doubt the man who acted as your ready tool and accomplice was well rewarded for his trouble, since his efforts were directed to remove me forever from your path. He would have succeeded had not my faith in God still remained in my aching heart.

If I were to live a thousand years, I should not forget that miserable Christmas, when you sent him to me.

Suppose he had succeeded in his diabolical design to send me on the road to moral destruction, the responsibility would have been yours and yours alone.

God only knows how madly I loved you. I would have followed you to the very end of the world, wife or mistress. What have I ever done to deserve this awful treatment.

You came into my life only to destroy it. You swore at the very grave of my mother to love and protect me; and how did you keep your oath?

You picked me like a flower from the roadside, and when bereft of its fragrance, cast it into the dust.

Were I less of a gentlewoman, I would stoop to wreak a terrible revenge upon your head. But what would that avail me?

Perhaps it was the will of the Almighty that I should be the one to nurse your wife and bring

her back to you. In spite of it all, I am glad of that, because it gave me the opportunity to study her character.

You may live still under the delusion that she loves you; but when you awake from your dream you will find but an empty shell.

That woman has no soul. Her fatal beauty may hold you ensnared until her true nature asserts itself.

Your disillusion will come like a sudden flash of lightning. She will drag your name down into the dust, the same as you have done mine. That will be your punishment.

You may bask in the sunlight of pleasures which your wealth can afford you, while I must forever hang my head in shame; because my child will not have an honest name.

Farewell, Robert. It would be useless for you to make an attempt to find me. I know not what fate has in store for me. I can find it in my heart to forgive you, in spite of all the wrong you have done me.

Will God be as lenient when you shall stand before Him?

Your heartbroken

Hazel.

Robert Ames staggered slightly. His face was ghastly and for a moment he could not find words to express his anger.

"Alice," he gasped at last, "what was your rea-

son for concealing these facts. Why did you hide this letter, which should have been given to me at once?"

It seemed that she was not quite ready to answer these questions.

She stared at her husband defiantly as she replied after a pause:

"I had a very good reason for doing what I did, since the letter incriminated me."

"Then you admit that you had a hand in this vile intrigue?" he cried, advancing a few paces. His attitude was threatening as he seized her wrist and held it in a vise-like grip.

She made no answer save to nod her head.

"You—you!" he hissed, then threw her aside with a violent motion of his hand.

His anger had risen to a fever heat, and the thick veins stood out like heavy cords on his pale forehead.

The fierce flash of his eyes boded ill for Alice.

His right hand was raised menacingly; but his wife faced him unflinchingly. Her attitude in this dramatic moment was one of defiance and utter indifference.

"Why don't you strike?" she sneered, raising herself to her full height. "You coward——!"

Robert Ames fell back as from a heavy blow.

"You dare call me that?" he panted.

"Yes, I dare," Alice replied vehemently. "Was it not the work of a coward to trick this girl into a mock marriage, then suddenly leave her? Was it not the work of a coward when you entered into a second marriage with me, fully knowing that it was against the laws of God and man to do so?"

With her eyes flashing fire, she moved a step closer to him and continued:

"You assume the right to take me to task for

having guarded my own interests. You call me selfish, treacherous and deceitful. You seem to forget that your own acts condemn you in scathing terms; and that your conduct was that of a criminal.

"No—no!" she cried, as he raised his hand, "you must hear me to the end. First of all I want you to know that I am not trying to shield myself.

"I am guilty of having instigated the separation between you and Hazel. I am guilty of having hidden this letter from you, because the thought of you going back to her was unbearable to me.

"I would a thousand times rather die than to share you with any other woman.

"When you married me I knew that one of us was destined to suffer, either Hazel or I. Had I loved you less, perhaps I would not have stood between you and the other woman; but now I will never give you up to her."

Alice's voice was intense as she spoke.

She trembled in every limb as she rose to her own defense. When she finished her strength was gone, and with a moan she sank into the nearest chair.

There she sat for some moments before either of them spoke again.

Robert Ames had been utterly overwhelmed by her vehement outburst, and was beginning to realize that there was some justification for her acts.

"Alice," he said at last in a strangely altered tone. "I am very sorry, yes, more sorry than mere words can express. I know that I am to blame. Come let us reason this thing out together. You know we cannot go on like this.

"We must find some way to adjust matters. My first duty will be to find Hazel. Upon my knees I will sue for pardon. She will be the mother of my child, and

therefore my obligations to her must be considered first of all.

"Besides," he added after a slight pause. "I married her because I loved her with all my heart and soul, and I love her still. This love no power on earth could tear from my heart. I shall not know a peaceful hour until I have found her."

Alice had risen from her seat. The expression of her face was one of apparent resignation.

She saw that it would be utterly useless to make another attempt to win him.

Her heart turned sick within her as she realized that she had been playing a losing game.

Her indomitable spirit rose. She would no longer plead with him, and with her lovely dark head raised proudly, she walked over to the door.

"You must follow the dictations of your conscience in this matter, Robert," she said, her voice quivering slightly. "I—I will bow to the inevitable. But remember, I love you."

Robert Ames had risen also.

He wanted to thank her for her words; but she raised her hands to ward him off.

"Please do not say another word," she panted. "Go!"

Her finger pointed to the door.

When the door had closed after him, she burst into a sudden fit of laughter. There was a strange light in her eyes as she sat down at her desk and wrote a letter to young Russel Sherwood.

From time to time she paused deeply in thought. Then she would go on with a peculiar smile playing about her sensuous lips.

When the letter was finished she placed it in an envelope and sealed it. To make sure that none of the

servants might lose it, and thus prevent it from reaching young Russel Sherwood, she decided to mail it herself.

She dressed hurriedly for the street and, her face hidden behind a veil, she walked to the nearest post office.

There was a look of quiet determination on her pale face when she returned home. For no matter how her affair with Robert Ames would terminate, she would have someone to admire and love her.

Chapter 296

A VAIN SEARCH

THE CLOCK had struck the hour of midnight, and every room in the Ames villa was dark, except the library. Robert Ames was still seated at his desk with his head resting very wearily on his hands.

There was a far away look in his moist eyes, as he stared at the letter lying before him.

His anger had given way to a strange feeling of unrest and doubtful anticipations.

With his mind still in a state of complete chaos, he tried to find some way out of this extremely unpleasant dilemma.

The words of Alice had made a deep impression upon him. His conscience smote him sorely as his mind wandered over his misdeeds of the past.

He would gladly have given every penny he possessed to be able to extricate himself from this entanglement without causing any heartaches.

This, however, seemed utterly impossible.

His own heart swelled at the thought of again seeing his Hazel, and the conviction grew upon him that his duty to her and her child must be his first consideration.

It was almost morning when he at last arrived at a conclusion.

He rose quickly and went to his room. When he sought a few moments rest and oblivion in peaceful sleep, he found that this was denied him.

His feverish brain made sleeping utterly impos-

sible. He waited until the clock struck six, then he rose and dressed hurriedly.

He ordered his automobile to be brought to the door at once, and shortly before nine o'clock he arrived at Dr. Haines' private sanitarium.

His first disappointment came when he was informed that Dr. Haines was no longer connected with the institution, and that he had died some months since, while traveling in California.

Robert's voice trembled as he asked a number of questions about the nurse by the name of Hazel Wynne.

His hopes suffered a severe blow at being told that Miss Wynne had left the sanitarium, and that her present whereabouts was not known.

He made his way back to the waiting automobile with his head bowed in deep thought. He was disappointed, but not discouraged.

Suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps Hazel might have gone to one of the many hospitals of Philadelphia to continue in her chosen vocation as nurse.

His first move was to obtain the names of all the hospitals in the city.

This done, he began to make inquiries at every one of them for a nurse who called herself Miss Wynne. All that day he spent in a fruitless search.

At last he concluded to put the matter in the hands of a detective agency, and he gave his chauffeur orders to drive him at once to the Pinkerton detective offices.

Robert was received courteously by the man in charge. He stated his case plainly, while the detective listened attentively.

He explained that the woman he sought had last been employed at the Stewart mansion as a governess, and that she had disappeared suddenly without leaving

any trace.

The detective made a number of notes and announced that he would most likely have some news for Robert Ames, and asked him to call two days later, if convenient.

The intervening two days were like an eternity to the anxious young lover. He arrived at the time set by the detective with an eager light in his eyes.

He gasped for breath when he was informed that the woman he sought was employed in the exclusive residence section of Kensington as companion to a Mrs. Ashton.

After being furnished with the address he hurried away, his heart beating with happy anticipation.

He urged his chauffeur on to greater speed, and the car raced along the street far in excess of the speed limit.

Robert Ames vaguely wondered how his wife would receive him.

Would she fly into his arms with a happy cry, or would she meet him with a cold, indifferent stare.

When the automobile came to a stop in front of the Ashton residence, his heart was beating like a trip hammer. He trembled from head to foot as he approached the house.

The door was opened by a handsome young man.

To his intense surprise, Robert Ames was curtly informed that Miss Wynne had been employed as the companion of Mrs. Ashton, but had left her position a week ago.

His heart stopped beating when he was told that Hazel was to be married in the near future.

He was not able to learn her address, and went away with his last hope gone.

There was no end to his punishment, and yet he

realized that he was only reaping what he had sown.

What right had he to force himself into the presence of this woman, whom he had so shamefuly neglected?

She had the right to marry whom she chose, since by law she was not his wife.

He laid back in his seat and allowed his mind to wander over those scenese of the happy past which had been so dear to him. Even now he could see Hazel with his mind's eye.

He saw again the golden tresses that curled between the rim of the sunbonnet and the delicate white brow.

Her lovely pink face with its dimpled cheeks and roguish eyes had taken his heart by storm.

It was the face of a child who was also a woman —a child waiting to be awakened with a kiss into womanhood.

He sighed as he thought of his first meeting with Hazel.

Again he saw her standing before him, straight and slim, with a half frightened expression in her wonderful eyes.

She had appeared to him like a beautiful flower to be plucked and worn.

A pleasant smile was playing about his lips as he mentally recounted the happy hours of the past.

He had been happy then, yes, completely happy, until the fatal message came which called him to the bedside of his dying father.

Robert Ames awoke suddenly from his reverie when the automobile came to a stop in front of his club.

He gave the chauffeur instructions not to wait for him, as it would most probably be very late before

would be ready to go home.

When he entered the club he was at once hailed by a number of his old friends, among whom was Ralph Stewart.

His extremely cordial reception was a tribute to his popularity, and it took him fully an hour to explain to his many friends why he had stayed in seclusion for this length of time.

At last he was able to draw Ralph Stewart into a corner by himself for a few minutes of serious conversation.

He told him of his unsuccessful efforts to find Hazel, and also that he had been informed at her last place of employment that she was about to be married.

Ralph Stewart listened silently with a grave expression on his face. When Robert had finished he shook his head slowly and said:

"I positively refuse to believe that Hazel is to be married or that she could love another man. There must be some mistake about that rumor."

Robert Ames looked up quickly. The words of his friend fell pleasantly upon his ears.

They sent his hopes soaring again, and his spirits rose simultaneously.

He was about to make a reply when one of his old college chums spied him, and came forward with a joyous shout. This ended his confidential chat with Ralph Stewart.

Robert Ames found himself unceremoniously dragged forth into a circle of young men. Most of them had been his classmates at Harvard.

The hour was late when he rose a trifle unsteady to his feet and announced that the time had come when all decent young men should go home.

His friends were reluctant about permitting him to depart, but when he insisted they called a taxi and gave him a rousing send-off.

It was a few minutes before twelve o'clock when the taxi came to a stop at the gate of the villa. After paying the chauffeur, Robert sauntered leisurely toward the house.

The night was a most beautiful one. The pale moon flooded the spacious park with a silvery light, and the many fragrant flowers were nodding their heads sleepily.

Robert stood enchanted before the wonderful scene before him.

In spite of the late hour he felt no inclination to go to his room and seek the much needed rest. He lit a fresh cigar and began to walk up and down the narrow path.

Suddenly he stopped. He imagined he had heard the whispering of voices.

A gust of wind came along and he could not hear anything but the rustling of the leaves. Robert Ames walked on with a smile on his face.

Again he stopped. This time he was convinced that it was not imagination, but the sound of human voices which struck his ears.

He listened intently for several minutes. His first thought was that perhaps burglars were lurking about the place, and he moved forward cautiously. It seemed that the whispering came alternately.

As he advanced in the direction whence it came, he noticed that his steps were leading him toward the small summer house, which stood amid a cluster of trees.

His heart ceased beating when he recognized one of the voices. It was that of Alice. The other was that

of a man, and it sounded very familiar.

But try as he would, he could not remember just where he had heard that man's voice before. Again he heard Alice say something which ended in a low laugh.

And then once more came that familiar masculine voice.

Chapter 297

CAUGHT

THE CLOCK struck eleven when Alice left the villa by a side door. She stopped frequently and glanced furtively about to make sure that no one saw her. When at last she reached the outside she hurried forward and a moment later arrived at the little summer house in the park.

With a reckless toss of her head she opened the door and entered. The interior of the little house was very dark.

First she made sure that all the shutters were closed, then she touched a button which flooded the room with a brilliant light.

Her face was a trifle pale, but in her black eyes burned the fire of passion.

With an impatient gesture she pulled out her watch. A dark frown clouded her lovely face when she noticed that it was almost twenty minutes past eleven.

"I wonder if he failed to get my letter?" she said half aloud.

Then with her hands tightly clenched behind her back she began to pace the floor. Her heart was torn with many conflicting emotions at this particular moment.

A battle was being waged between honor and desire. Prudence she had cast to the winds. Had not her husband deliberately thrown her aside for this other woman?

He had chosen to neglect her.

Continued in next number

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